



### **God's Church-Part 4**

The Life-Changing Message of His Church  
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Well, I've never really been a race car fan, but I do remember as a child growing up in Long Beach when the Grand Prix came to our town. I have to admit, I caught the fever there. It was an exciting time and I was taken in by these amazing cars that they raced through the downtown streets of my hometown. I remember looking at these Formula One race cars for the first time as a kid and really examining what amazing, sleek vehicles these were. Then, of course, when I got to hear them, that roar, that throaty, loud sound of those engines, it just took me in as a little boy. I remember the summer leading up to the fall races drawing pictures of the Formula One cars. I was just so enamored by it all.

Now, I understand that these cars, as they drive across the finish line, are just the tools of the driver. I mean, the driver stands on the podium and everyone cheers and the driver's responsible for the win. I suppose even as I think about being so enamored with the vehicle, if you were going to be technical about it, I mean, the glory for the vehicle should go to the designer and the craftsman who built it and the mechanics who maintain it. I get all that. But, I mean, there's nothing wrong with me standing back and looking at these cars and saying these are amazing instruments, amazing vehicles, amazing cars. You even see the winner on the podium often afterwards going down and leaning on his car, taking pictures and photos for the magazines of his Formula One race car.

From my pastoral perspective, looking at Christians these days, particularly in well-taught churches, which I'd like to think we are, I think we have a problem with how we view ourselves. I understand that when we think of things that are big that God does in the world, when the Church excels, when God's people are utilized to reach a community for Christ, or when we see people's environment, their homes, their lives, their entire direction transformed, we realize, as we should, that God gets the glory for that. I understand that. And rightfully so. Our lives are just instruments of God. And in one sense, we can say we're nothing.

But one of the problems with taking that perspective is that we can so minimize our role in what God is doing in the world that we really cease to think biblically about who we are. We can begin to so minimize the role in what God wants to do in the world that we stop taking the responsibility upon ourselves, at least the way that we should, and even enjoying and reveling in the fact that God is using us to get things done in our generation. Could he use someone else? Of course he could. I mean, does he get the glory for what he does? Should he get the credit for making a difference in people's lives, even if it's through our instrumentality? Well, of course. Yes, I mean, he is the designer of our lives. He's the architect of our life. He's the maintainer of our lives. He fuels our lives. And the work is ultimately his. But there's nothing wrong with us recognizing that in the Bible often the terminology that relates to the instrument puts the instrument in a place of high importance. Something that should be for the instrument, a meaningful experience, that we are doing something that is significant.



Certainly a farmer would tell you there's stuff that goes on in the soil with those seeds that no human being can really change. There's nothing we can produce, the ground produces it. God, in his wisdom, has designed those things to grow. As we think about the analogy of our mission being like a harvest field, we know that God is the one who does it. He bears the fruit. He causes the growth. But ask any farmer, the laborers are really important. I mean, they are essential in the role of making sure that that crop comes to harvest and that it is harvested and that that fruit is cared for.

I recognize that certainly when I think about my role in the evangelistic harvest of our generation. And you ought to also. When Jesus talks about the harvest, he says in Matthew 9 that the fields they're ripe for harvest, they're white for harvest. It's out there and the harvest is plentiful, as he puts it in that passage. He said, but the problem is "the workers are few." That really puts the workers in a place of importance in this equation. The workers are few. And then he says this: you ought to be praying. "Pray to the Lord of the harvest," is the strongest word in the Greek language for prayer. You ought to beg him. You ought to call out to him. The old translation, "you ought to beseech him." "You ought to be praying earnestly to the Lord of the harvest that he might send forth workers into the harvest." And that's a strong word too, "Ekballo." They had a lot of words for "send." And there were other words, but this is a strong word, to throw them out, to thrust forth workers, we need more instruments for the work of evangelism in the harvest field. And that elevates us to a particular place in all of this, not to take credit for ourselves and we certainly are not the people causing all this growth. We are recipients of God's grace from the very start.

But being an instrument of God's grace in evangelism is a big and significant deal. It ought to get us excited. We ought to see it as a privilege. It ought to motivate us. We ought to see how important it is even to start to use biblical terms that so many of us are uncomfortable with because we are a church that has a high view of God.

Biblical terms, for instance, when Jesus calls Paul, who is at that point is Saul, and he says, "I've chosen you for a purpose. You're going to bring a message to a generation that you're going to be a part of." And then he uses words that are active verbs related to Paul. "You are going to open their eyes." Now, wait a minute, who opens the eyes of the spiritually blind? Well, God does. But God is willing to use those kinds of terms to say you are going to be the instrumentality through which God opens eyes. And then even though the English Standard Version turns this into a passive in English, it is an active verb in the Greek language, "and you are going to turn them from darkness to light." You're going to be that instrument that redirects lives.

That certainly echoed through Paul's life, though he can say in the big picture and really there's nothing inherent about me. I have no power in and of myself in the sense God is giving all the growth and I am nothing. He could say that about himself and Paul and Apollos. But he does say things like this. He says "I'll become all things to all men so that by all means I might save some." Whoa, whoa, whoa, Apostle Paul, you don't save anyone. No, I understand that. Just like a car doesn't win the race, but we can say that car won.



Well, that car didn't win, the driver won. And even if that car did anything, it was mechanics and designers and there were maintainers and there was fuel inside of it that had nothing to do with that car. It's just an instrument of the win. But that's an important instrument. I want you to look in the mirror this week and say you are an important instrument that God is going to use in your sphere of influence to win people to Christ. That is an amazing privilege. You've been given a huge entrustment.

I mean, Paul himself says this in Second Corinthians 5. He says, "All of this is from God." He's talking about people who are new creatures in Christ. "All of this is from God." But then he says, "Who has entrusted us with the message of reconciliation." And we're out there imploring people as though God were making his appeal through us. OK. God gets the credit, but as he makes his appeal through us, we declare a message, "Be reconciled to God," that changes people's lives. I don't want you to get a big head. But I don't want our high view of God to minimize the instrumentality that you have, the role that you have to play. You are salt and you are light and you represent the message. You call out to those around you, the people you rub shoulders with every single week. You are the answer. Oh, you're not the point and you're not the purpose, and God could enlist a donkey, I suppose, to bring the message to people. I get that. But you've got to think more highly of the role that you play in all of this.

And there's no better illustration of that than when the country bumpkin, if I can put it that way, the Galilean who they could recognize from their country accent, Peter, a fisherman, can stand up in front of the masses who have come, the wealthy enough to travel, some of the spiritually astute in Jerusalem, he can stand there 50 days after Jesus was crucified and he can call them all to feel the culpability for that. He can call them all out on their sin. He can say to them, "You all need to repent." And then to have a harvest of 3,000 people.

Do I want Peter going home that day doing this: "Hey, look what I did"? I don't want him to be a prideful instrument in God's hand. God's looking for humble vessels. But God is praying for more workers to be thrust out into the field and you have a sphere of influence. There are people on your kid's soccer team, those parents who you sit on the sidelines with. There are people on that committee that you serve in, there are those people at that gym that you work out. There are folks, of course, at your workplace you rub shoulders with every single week. God has you as an instrument and a means by which those people can be saved. The message you bear is powerful and therefore you are a powerful instrument in God's hands.

I'm not trying to stroke your ego. I'm not trying to make you a prideful person. I just want you to stop with this "I'm nothing" mentality if it leads you to a place where you can't even use biblical terms. "Going into this office, I'm going to see people saved. I'm going to be the means to turn them from darkness to light. I'm going to open their eyes to the truth." I know the power doesn't reside in you. I've got to have you think more biblically about your role so you can leave here excited about the privilege to share the gospel with people.

Take a look at Peter, the Galilean preaching to the folks in Jerusalem who were there for the Feast of Pentecost. We've spent a few sessions now in this. This is the third session of this sermon when the conviction settles in. Turn to this passage, if you haven't already, Acts Chapter 2, and I

want you to look at verse 37. But I guess before we look at verse 37 as to what happens when Peter is sharing this message, you got to look back at where this sermon had just ended. It ended with these quotations of the Old Testament and then he comes to this conclusion, look at verse 36, that the whole house of Israel, "Let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made him both Lord," he's the boss, he's in charge, "and Christ," he's the Messiah, he's the promised one of the Old Testament. Who? This Jesus from Galilee, from Nazareth, "This Jesus," now here's some preaching, "that you crucified."

Do you think some of them, all these visitors from out of town, were there crying out, "Crucify him"? Well, they were probably there for the Passover feast if they're faithful to go to the pilgrimage feasts, three a year, they were supposed to come to Jerusalem. Well, probably some of them were. A lot of them weren't. But see, that's the whole message of the Bible, that "the wages of sin is death." If you're not going to die before a holy God, there's got to be some kind of death in your place. That was the picture of Old Testament worship, bring your animal and have that animal die. There's a symbol of the death that you deserve.

But you can go home forgiven. You can go home knowing that God will somehow supply a lamb to take away your sin. And so they knew that their sin caused the death, the death of a substitute. Oh, if it's just an animal and we eat the lamb chops afterwards and we think, "Yeah, well, that's an interesting thing, death so that I can live." Well, that's one thing if it's an animal from your herd but when they start to think about human sin really requires human punishment and that as a human being who has the worth not of just one human being, but all human beings who would be saved, because he's divine, that that Christ would die in our place. That's an amazing thought that my sin caused his death. And he brings it to that sharp focus.

Verse 37 gives us the response. And if you're willing to do what Peter was willing to do on that day, saying, I'm not afraid, I'm not going to be scared, I might have sweaty palms, I might have wobbly knees, but I'm going to share the gospel, the good news of God's truth, that there's forgiveness available, sometimes you're going to see this happen. You're going to see people who are cut to the heart.

Let's read it, verses 37 through 41. "Now when they had heard this they were cut to the heart." Literally, the Greek word is "stabbed." They felt that stab of conviction. "And they said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'" I mean, you just called them murderers. You said the Messiah came and you murdered him. You killed him. That's repeated like five, maybe six times in the book of Acts. You killed him. You crucified him. You killed him. I mean, that's some harsh stuff. Your sin caused that event. And yet when he says it and he's bold enough and loving enough to tell the truth, in some cases, people feel the conviction. They say, "What now? What now? What do I do? I'm a sinner. I've caused the death of Christ. What do I do?"

Peter said to them one word. We've seen it over and over. It started the preaching of Christ in Mark Chapter 1. "He says, 'Repent, repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" You'll have an intimate, close relationship with the Triune God. Not as close as it will be, but you will be



accepted by God, "For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off," which is an interesting thing to say because all these pilgrims had come from all over the ancient world. He says, take this back. It's going to go everywhere to the ends of the earth. "Everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself." End of sermon.

Summary by Luke, "And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them." That's hard. That's a hard word. Here's what you need. You don't know it. I need to impress this truth upon you and exhort them. What kinds of things was he saying? Well, he's saying this: "You've got to save yourself from this crooked generation." Save yourself? Yeah. Save yourself. Get out from this crooked generation. These folks that have this problem with God, just step out from that crowd. "So those who received his word were baptized, and they were added that day about 3,000 souls."

Can you imagine? 3,000 people coming to faith in Christ as Peter raises his voice and preaches about the problem of sin and the gracious solution in Christ and calls them to a radical response of repentance? That's amazing. And it's the same thing that can happen now for all those who are far off, even you on the other side of the planet, 2,000 years later, there are people in our sphere of influence. We sit here in a populist place. I wouldn't want to pastor in a non-populous place. I want to be in a place where the harvest is big.

There are at least a million people within reasonable driving distance of our church. You look at all the places we work, all the places we live, all the places you go to eat and you draw a circle around that. There are, I mean, at least a million people who are in our own backyard. I mean, we could see 3,000 people won to Christ. We'd have to add a couple services, but we could do that. I mean, there's a harvest and we're not sitting here in a Christianize society where everyone goes to church and everyone's got it right with God. There's so much potential. There are so many opportunities we have to share this message.

This message is powerful, but it's going to start with conviction, when people's hearts are convicted. That's what happens, verse 37, it's a very strong phrase here. They were stabbed to the heart. Cut to the heart. And they said, "What do we do?" Not "you just call me a murderer of Christ. Put up your dukes. I don't believe that. I don't think I'm a sinner. Why would God ever punish me?" They're not fighting. They're opening their arms and saying what do we do? That's conviction.

Number one on your outline. That's what we need to start praying for, that our words would lead to that. We need that. You're not saved without it. Number one, if you're taking notes, "Pray for Convicted Hearts." That's what you need to be praying for. And I want you to write it down that way because I do know this: it is God's work, but you're the instrument of that. You are the means by which that happens. He says to you, go and share the message of the gospel.

Without oversimplifying, because we've dealt with it throughout the passage, I just, I mean, I've already said it but let me say it again. Here's the deal. There is a big problem. Want to put it in six words? "Big problem." Sin. Right? There's a big problem. You and I are in big trouble with God. The good news is this. That's the bad news, the good news is this: God has provided a gracious



response, a "gracious solution," a gracious provision. God has responded to our problem by giving us the means to get out of the trouble. He said there is an Ark available. There may be a flood coming, but there's a way for you to get out of this. Then he calls us to this "radical response" we're going to look at in verse 38.

But it starts with the bad news. And that's the problem with preaching this message in South Orange County in the 21st century. Matter of fact, anywhere in the Western world. I mean, a lot of people can go to church, you can find a place that's going to open the Bible, talk about God, talk about Christ and they're going to have you leave feeling really good that God is all for you. Even if you have no background in Christianity, if you have no knowledge of theology, you don't know anything about the Old Testament or the New Testament, they're going to tell you God loves you, he's for you, he's going to help you. Just kind of open up your heart to him and things are going to be better for you. Well, that's not the gospel. The gospel is a gracious solution, but it's not going to happen until there is a convicted heart. And the convicted heart is "I see the problem."

Matter of fact, we use the word "conviction" and I think this passage, verse 37, is a great explanation of, at least in church, what you mean by using the word conviction. "Hey, that sermon was really convicting." What do you mean? "Well, it really stung. Right? Kind of stabs me in the heart. I had that sense of, you know, wow, that's bad and I'm not where I ought to be."

But if you use the word "conviction" outside of church, maybe you're watching, you know, your little detective shows or courtroom shows or, you know, the whatever. You know, when you're watching the crime whatever, you get these scenes where someone goes to court and they are "convicted" of their crime. Convicted. Well, if you look up in the dictionary what conviction means, well, that's what it means. That's the first definition, at least, is the definition of someone declaring someone guilty. You don't say they're convicted innocent. You say they're convicted as a criminal. They're convicted for the crime. Convicted means you're declared as guilty. That's the idea in our English usage of the word "conviction."

When we come to church, though, we talk about conviction. We talk about feeling conviction. What we mean is that our heart starts to catch up with the facts. I mean, the truth is, verse 36, you have crucified Christ. Your sins have caused that. You are guilty before God. God had to pay for your sin. God had to somehow justly respond to the problems of your iniquities and transgressions and your falling short. All that had to be paid for. That is what the cross was all about. You're guilty. Your conviction is to start to agree with that.

A guy who never figured that out was Harry Truman. I'm not talking about the president, by the way. I'm talking about the Harry Truman that you might have read about in the news back when Mount St. Helens exploded. Do you remember that? Harry Truman was this old octogenarian who's like 82 or something, and he became this folk hero because when everyone else was told to evacuate, he kind of stuck his cane in the ground and said, "I ain't leavin'. I ain't afraid of, you know, a volcano." I don't know if he talked like that, but he looked like that crotchety old 80-year-old guy who wasn't going to be told by the government what to do. You know, the geologist can come in and tell him it's going to explode. "I don't care. I don't mind. I'll be fine. I'll overcome." I



mean, Harry Truman was all about like, "I don't care about your stupid warnings. This is my house. I'm comfortable here. There's no problem."

Of course there was a problem. Right? Mount St. Helens exploded. And Harry... he died. As a matter of fact, if you read about how he died, the official cause of death, as they recovered the bodies that died on the side of the mountain, "asphyxiation by inhaling hot ash." I want you to think about that. I mean, that's an awful thing to think about. I mean, there are a lot of ways to die but can you imagine? You're breathing in this molten ash. I mean, this was a horrible thing. He died in a horrible way. I mean, he suffocated on burning hot ash.

Well, he was warned. But here's the thing. When the warning came and they said, "You're in trouble, you're in peril, you're in bad shape here. You got to leave. You got to get out of your comfortable life and everything you think is fine and all the creature comforts of your home. You've got to leave this place." He was never convicted of that. He never felt the conviction of "You're right." He never agreed with the sentence.

I know it's hard for us to go around like Noah and say there's a flood coming because it takes you back to a caricature of Christianity that you and I have decided in our culture is antiquated, it's something that, you know, maybe our great grandparents did, and they had the bell and the sandwich board and it was turn or burn. It was all this threatening talk about God. We don't want to talk like that. We want a God that's going to kind of merge into your life and make your life better. We love the appeal of the gospel that God loves you, he has a wonderful plan for you and it's just great. Would you just open up your heart to the love of Christ? We love those things.

But the love of Christ means nothing if we don't understand the conviction that is already there. The diagnosis of a problem. What we're calling for, what we're praying for, what the message of the gospel is trying to say is there is a problem, you are in peril. Turn-or-burn may be a caricature of biblical evangelism of days gone by. But you tell me, please, what's the error of those three words. Right? I mean, that is the message of the gospel.

Matter of fact, I mean you see it in verse 40, "Save yourself from this crooked generation." You could see Noah even saying, "Hey, you are going to drown." Talk about asphyxiation. Talk about drowning. You're going to drown with water in your lungs unless you respond and get in this Ark. Now, you're never going to celebrate the joy of having a bunk in the Ark until you realize in your own heart the conviction that you're right. We are a sinful society. We deserve to be judged. Do you know what? It's right for God to drown this whole generation. But do you know what? There's a gracious response. Great. Let me get on the boat. Let me get on this Ark. See, the gospel means nothing, really, and I say gospel, the good news means nothing until we process the bad news.

You ought to be praying for people to feel conviction. You may not want to be a messenger of that, but I'll tell you there's not a person in this room, look at me now, there's not a person in this room who is genuinely saved, who has their name written in the Lamb's Book of Life, that I'm going to spend eternity with, not a person in this room who has not walked through the portal of a convicted heart. You had to. Right? Raise your eyebrows at me. That had to be you or you are



not saved. If we don't know the problem of sin, we do not know the salvation provided in the cross.

And I know we're afraid. Who wants to go tell our co-workers you're a sinner? Who wants to go tell your family members at Thanksgiving, "Hey, you know what? You're going to hell?" I mean, you may want to say that occasionally, but you don't want to say that if you really have a relationship and you want them to be encouraged, you want to give them good news, not bad news. It's going to be really, really hard for us in our generation, in a day when everyone has pretty much accepted the fact that religion should be a positive philosophy that never includes anything that would lead to a stabbing of your heart. The real gospel, if it's given, is going to provoke this response. It is the portal to salvation. No one gets into the blessing of salvation without ducking through this very lowly, humiliating reality that we are sinners and we deserve God's judgment.

Praise God for their sake and for God's glory that they were cut to the heart because then they were ready for the answer. They were ready to say, what do we do? And Peter then could respond with the answer. Look at verse 38. Peter said to them, here's the word, "Repent." I've said it many times from this platform, the word repent. If you wanted to give it a vernacular equivalent in our language it would be "turn around." Matter of fact, that was the word apparently used in the ancient world to turn armies around, the about-face command was the word "Metanoia." Right? That's the word. "Metanoeo," that's the verb. It's a compound word. We talk about it a lot. "Meta" means "after." "Noeo," the verb, means to think. Noia from "Nous," the Greek word for "mind."

And I often argue from the platform, and rightly so, because the context is always making it clear, it's more than you just changing your mind. Because if you just want to think in component parts of the word, you could say, well, that's what it means, "think after." Right? It's an afterthought. It's thinking differently. I thought one way at one point, now I think differently. And you're right, that is the kernel, that's the essence of it. But because it's thinking differently in such major categories like, you know what, Jesus, who you willing to dismiss so much so that you would crucify him, now you're going to recognize is the Messiah and the boss. That's a huge change of mind. For you to say that I'm fine living the way I live, instead now recognizing, you know what? "No, you're right. I need to get out of this mess I'm in with God. I need some solution." That's a huge change of your mind.

It's a change that the Bible says God grants a new brain, a new mind, a new heart, which was the center, not just of our emotions, it was the center of our thinking. And so metanoia, in the core, I'm not denying the fact that nous, the idea, or noeo, the verb, I'm not saying that it's not that my mind is involved in some kind of change. But it's going to be a change that results in changed action. Right? It always is. As a matter of fact, that's why I think it's paired with something here that we know of as baptism in the name of Jesus Christ.

We think that this has to be water baptism, because that's the way it was set up in the Great Commission. You make disciples and you baptize them. You make a disciple. How do you make them? The same way John the Baptist made disciples. He called them to repentance. The same



way Jesus made his disciples, you called them to repentance. It's the same message in Luke 24, the record of the Great Commission there. Repent. Right? Take the message of repentance for the forgiveness of sins to all nations. Repent, repent, repent, repent.

Well, why is he tacking on baptism here? Baptism? Because repentance is always going to change your mind, your heart, it's going to transform who you are in the core to where you're going now in a different direction. Now you're going to be, just like when Peter was first called to follow Christ, "Follow me." Well, now what? "Well drop your nets? Follow me." "Where are we going?" "Well, I'll tell you where we're going. We're not going to be here. We're going to go there." "Well, who's going to tell me where to go? Well, you are, because I'm following you. So you're the leader now."

Repentance is this relinquishing of the directional focus and progress of my life. I'm saying now, "Christ, you're in charge." And for us, we can still do that 2,000 years later, though, Christ is not physically here to say, follow me. "Where we're going to go down Aliso Viejo Parkway and we're going to head up to Irvine." I mean, we don't follow Christ, but we follow what he says. And you know what he says? The first thing that disciples ought to do: "Get baptized."

The combination of these two things is not that strange. The combination of these two things, first of all, should not be mistaken for, "Well, when the water crests over the top of your forehead, well, then your name gets written in the Lamb's Book of Life." It cannot mean that. "Well, how do you know it can't mean that? It seems to say that right there, 'Be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, you receive the Holy Spirit.'" Well, I understand that. Here's the combination. Right? You repent, which is something radically changed in the interior of your life. Of course, it's a gift of God. God produces that. And now go do what he says. The first step, the first act of obedience is to be baptized. Why in the world would those be paired together? How do I know that that's not something that I add to the response of this penitent faith in Christ? Well, how do I know that?

Well, because I would see it everywhere. Matter of fact, that would be the focus. It would be the focus so extensively that it would be something that we would not only see recorded repeatedly throughout the Scripture. Right? We would see Paul so interested in having people baptized in the city because repentance, I guess that's just one component part, then you've got to get them baptized.

Write this down, if you would. First Corinthians, Chapter 4, Paul, boasts in the fact that he was the agency of salvation among the Corinthians. He said, "You might have many guides in Christ, but you only have one father. I became your father through the gospel." In other words, I led you guys to Christ. That's First Corinthians 4. Now, write this down, First Corinthians Chapter 1. He talks about baptism in First Corinthians Chapter 1 and he says this, "You guys are so into who baptized you. You made a big deal out of it. 'I got baptized by this guy.' 'No, I got baptized by that guy.' You've created factions based on..." He says, "I'm glad I didn't baptize any of you guys. Well, except I guess for Gaius and Crispus. I did baptize those guys. Oh, and now come to think of it," next verse he says, "I did baptize the household of Stephanas."



So you got two guys, Crispus and Gaius, and then he's got Stephanas, a household, which I don't know, maybe a bunch of people in that house. But he said, "Beyond that I didn't baptize anyone else," and I'm glad about that. Well, he's boasting in Chapter 4 about being the spiritual father of these converted people, and then he's sitting there in Chapter 1, going "I'm glad I didn't baptize you guys so you can't claim that you're baptized in my name."

What's the point? Well, how in the world can you claim to be the spiritual father of these people if you weren't baptizing these people? Well, baptism... I'm not trying to minimize the importance of it. It's very important and you should do it. Just like getting married. If your spouse says and they're the Lord, "Hey, we should have a ceremony." Well, then you should have the ceremony. But that's not what makes you married, the ceremony. Right? That is not. It's the covenant, and in our case, in our day, it's signing that piece of paper for the county recorder. But the ceremony, well, if that's what you've been asked to do and certainly if the one you're marrying is the Lord and Christ, we ought to do what he says.

And I guess it's an appropriate time for conviction on that matter right now if you've not been baptized in water. It's an expression of the Church and you can't go baptize yourself this afternoon in your Jacuzzi. Right? It needs to be something done as an expression of your commitment to the body of Christ, your inclusion in the body of Christ. I don't care if it was 20 years ago you got saved or 20 minutes ago, you need to get baptized.

But is that the point when my sins are washed away? As the Roman Catholic Church says in the catechism, is it the moment you get baptized that you become a child of God and that your mortal sin is wiped away? Well, no, that's not what the Bible teaches. Matter of fact, it's just the opposite. When it comes to the works that you do, there is no work that you can do that will get you saved. You're saved by grace, not as a result of works, including the work of baptism. None of them.

Well, you keep talking about repentance being a change in direction. I guess you're saved by the work of those good things. I'm not saying that. Matter of fact, I'm saying in all of this passage about the promise of the Holy Spirit being granted to us that this is a gift of grace, but it happens at the moment of that converted mind. And I guess I'm going to concede the point, that's the essence and nut of the word, *noeo*. It's our mind is now new, which is the way the Bible likes to put conversion. You're changed from the inside out.

Matter of fact, let's just jot that down. Not everything we expect to see. If there's biblical conviction, we're driving people to repent and that repentance is going to change everything inside of their lives. Number two, "Expect Converted Minds." That's an amazing privilege you have to, as Paul was told by Christ, to open their eyes, to turn them from darkness to light, for them to see the glory of the gospel. I mean, that's an amazing privilege you have to broker that. And it starts with this change in the interior of their mind.

If I were a chain smoker, this is an illustration everybody, I just want to be clear about that. I'm not a smoker. I don't smoke. I haven't smoked. I don't smoke cigars. I haven't smoked any joints. I haven't smoked. I don't smoke. It's an illustration (audience laughter). OK? Well, let's say I was a chain smoker and I smoked a cigarette every two hours. I guess that qualifies as a chain smoker.



Some of you smokers have to let me know if that does or not. I don't know. That would be, I would think, would be a pretty expensive habit. One cigarette every two hours.

And if I were to tell you that I had a cigarette an hour ago and now I'm here preaching this sermon and I'm not smoking. But if I told you I've repented of smoking, you know that that's an interior decision that has been made in my mind. Right? It's a resolve, you would assume, that I'm no longer going to do this. Well, if I didn't repent and I'm here preaching this sermon and I had a cigarette an hour ago. Well, I'm between cigarettes. I guess you wouldn't know if I really repented of it, whether or not you could look an hour from now to see if I have one and then three hours from now to see if I had another. And you would say, well, I can tell that he's repented of smoking because he doesn't smoke like he did before.

That's the change that comes from the interior resolve inside of us. You can't know really whether someone is repentant from the outside until we see the fruit of that. Let's why Paul and Act 26 says, "I've called them to repent and to prove their repentance by their deeds." But right now, if I said to you, I've quit smoking because I've repented of smoking, it could be true, even though there's no test of it yet. Like the thief on the cross. Was he really repentant? Did he really put his trust in Christ? Was he really a follower of Christ? Well, he's kind of tied up right now. Right? I mean, he has no time to follow Christ, but Jesus could look at his heart and go, you know what? "Today you would be with me in paradise." So was he repentant? He was. He had no chance to prove that he was going to be a different person. But there was real repentance in his heart.

So the reality of repentance is the change on the interior of who we are, which is a gift of God. But from our experience, our human experience, this is a resolve to say I'm no longer going to be this person. Matter of fact, to put it in terms of Second Corinthians 5, it is, repentance, really, is to "no longer live for myself, but to live for him who died for me and rose again." It's a directional decision to follow Christ. That's repentance. Leaving behind the old, directing my life toward the new. And I need some time to show that. Do I need time to repent? No, you repent in the moment.

There's a story that Jesus told, it's probably the most famous parable he ever told, in Luke 15. We know it as the prodigal son, but it's the lost son. He's lost. Like the lost coin, the lost sheep, there's a lost son. He's alienated from his father. But the story is so well told, it begins with us getting a sense of what this son was like before he went out as the prodigal and spent all of his father's money. It starts with this: him demanding his father's inheritance. I want you to think about that.

That's a great, I mean, obviously, Jesus' illustrations are great. Here's a great illustration of someone saying, "I want the stuff that you give, that you earned, that is not mine, I didn't earn it, I want my inheritance. The stuff you earned and piled up, I want it." Which, by the way, think about that. I know some of you who want your parents' inheritance. You think you deserve it or you're owed it, but you're not. Right? Your parents could spend every last dollar they have and leave you nothing and there'd be no immorality to that at all. There's nothing wrong with that. I mean they can give it all to Compass 2020 (audience laughter). There would, I mean, there's nothing you could say about that. That's how it works.



But this man, just like so many non-Christians, just like you and I before we came to Christ, say, "I want my stuff from you." It's why we get so mad when God takes stuff away, like my good health or my family or my friends or my job. When those things are taken away we get mad. We say those are mine. We feel as though we're owed all those things.

So he's demanding his inheritance, but he wants to turn his back on his father. So he does. And he goes to a faraway country. We get far away from God as I can. "I just want the gifts of God. I don't want God." And, of course, he's known as the prodigal because he spends all the money on all the drinking and the partying and the prostitutes. Then he ends up where in the story? Feeding pigs. Good job for a good Jewish boy. Right? Feeding pigs. The swine that are not even ... they're unclean animals. And he's longing to be fed on the pods that feed the pigs. It is a terrible scene.

The story is told from the narrator's point of view, Christ is letting us see it from the point of view where we would go, "Oh, how disgusting." We see the problem. But at the point before he comes to his senses, he doesn't see the problem. He is convicted by the facts of the narrative. There's the conviction. We convict him as an onlooker, as you are in a mess, you're in a mess of trouble. You have no money. You spent all your inheritance. You're sitting here eating pods from the pigs. You're a mess.

And then that great line comes in verse 17, "when he came to himself," which is a weird way to put it. But if you want a picture of repentance, that's it. It's like I get it. Like Harry Truman on the side of the mountain going, you know what? I'm in big trouble here. I need to get out of this mess. And so it says in that passage, he says, "I will arise and go to my father's." Like me saying, I'm going to stop smoking. I repent right now of smoking. Right? He's made that decision. That is repentance. And yet he hadn't even gone to his dad yet. He just says, I'm going to go back and I know what I'm going to say. "Father, I've sinned against heaven and I've sinned before you. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son."

Here's someone demanding the gifts of the father. And now what is he saying? I don't deserve anything from you. I'm such a sinner. See, that's the conviction of our hearts. The conversion of our mind is, as it's put in that passage, verse 17, "coming to ourselves," coming to a realization that what you see objectively God, is true. I'm a sinner. That's what confession is. It's agreeing with God from his vantage point, his perspective, of the mess that I'm in and the mess that I am.

And so, it says he gets up, "he arose," to use English Standard Version terms, "he arose and went to his father." And guess what? He said exactly in the next verse what he had said in the previous verse, and that is he came to his father and said, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son."

So the repentance took place while he's got swine pod food in his hand. That's the real repentance. Then it works itself out in its behavior and then he goes back and he says, "I don't deserve anything from you." And of course, the great story of that passage is the father embraces him.



The gospel. You got a "big problem." The gospel. Right? You have been provided a "gracious solution." Then there's a call to a "radical response." There's the gospel in six words. "Big problem, gracious solution, radical response."

Let's look at the "radical response." Acts Chapter 2, verse 38, "Repent." That's the response. And we are calling people to that and we're hoping for that and that's it. And then what happens? Well, the father throws a party, calls everyone in and in that passage in Luke 15, they enjoy this reconciled relationship. There's a family that is there serving and enjoying one another. It's a great thing. That's exactly where this passage ends for us today.

Verse 40 and 41, "With many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, 'Save yourselves from this crooked generation.'" Get out from this mess. It's a mess out there. No one cares about God out there. No one submits to the lordship of Christ out there. No one is doing what God's will is. Get out from that crooked generation because it's under the sentence and judgment of God. Come and join us. That's what the picture of baptism is, joining this crew.

"And so those who received his word..." I often talk about this word when I think about what a great thing it is to broker the gospel to non-Christians. It says there in First Thessalonians Chapter 2, when Paul came to Thessalonica, he shared the message and he said, "You didn't receive it as the word of man. You received it for what it is, the Word of God." And the word received there is the word "Dechomai." Dechomai is the same word that is used on the Temple Mount when Simeon takes the baby Jesus into his arm. It's the welcoming word. It's a compound here. It's even strengthened here. Those who really just embrace the word, they welcomed the word. You could have used "lambano" or other Greek words for "taking it in" or "received it" or "agreed." But the word here is that word dechomai. They embraced the word.

And then they did exactly what Christ said we should do with new disciples, they were baptized. There were out of that number about 3,000 people. Think about going from 120 in a church to 3,000+. 3,120. That's a big day of growth. Talk about the harvest. That's a great day of harvest. What does that mean for all those people who were outside, who were under God's judgment, who are now in the Ark? Right? It may be uncomfortable in here, but, man, it is good to see all these people who recognize the truth, who are willing to agree with the conviction of the guilty sentence, felt convicted in their hearts and now have the sentence of their guilt removed and they get to join us.

Now, I can't wait to preach next week, Lord willing, verses 42 to the end of the chapter, of how great it is to be in the body of Christ. But think about the fact that if you bring this message to a co-worker, to a fellow parent at your kid's soccer game, you get an opportunity to be the brokering agent of bringing people out of the world and into the Church. I'm telling you, there's something amazing about that. We're going to talk about it next week at length. The idea of what it means to be a part of the fellowship and the community of the redeemed. That is a much bigger deal than most of us recognize. You get to see lives connected.

Number three, you ought to rejoice in that. There's nothing better than you being the agent of having someone come out from the world, step away from this perverse, crooked generation,



separate themselves from the world, and stand with the people of God. They sit with you as you sing worship songs. They open the Bible with you and share what they're learning. They have their names written in the Lamb's Book of Life and they are able to, as we're about to see in the next passage here, have their needs met in practical ways. You can't imagine the distinction, unless you've recently experienced it, from going out there in the world to being in a connected relationship with fellow believers with a real heart submitted to the Lordship of Christ. That is an amazing experience. It's like an orphan who has now been adopted into a family. It's a huge thing.

Talk about rejoicing "Rejoice in those kinds of Connected Lives." As Paul goes on to say in Ephesians about this thing, "aliens and strangers, no more." Outside, no hope, no longer. Now you're fellow citizens. "You're fellow citizens with the saints and members of God's household. We're all built on the foundation, the apostles and prophets," verse 20, "Christ himself is the cornerstone." But we now "being joined together," piece by piece, person by person, brick by brick, we're "built into a holy temple of the Lord, a place that we are being built together that is a dwelling place for God by his Spirit." Every time the Spirit convicts, brings and draws, to people all over the world, even to the 21st century, he calls to himself, and they become a part of a community of believers.

There's protection in that. There's help in that. There's strength in that. There's encouragement in that. There are all kinds of support in that that we're going to articulate, but what an amazing thing that you could have someone in the body of Christ who could point to you and say, "Hey, I know it's just an instrument, but because of that person, that gal, that guy, that teenager, I'm sitting here a part of God's family right now." It's an amazing thing, a thing that you and I should be privileged to be a part of.

Jesus was engaged in evangelism modeling for us what we ought to do. He didn't care if it was just a one stop, you know, at a drinking fountain, in this case, a well in Samaria. He's got an open door engaged in a conversation. The conversation is going to get to Christ eventually and it certainly did. He starts to speak of himself as the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies and this woman is sold. It starts with conviction, by the way, she's convicted about her sinful past. She comes to the realization that he's the Christ. You get that scene, as you read between the lines, of a converted heart. She goes across the valley into the city of Sychar, and she starts coming back with all these people.

The disciples had left Jesus there by himself to go get food. They come back into town with food in John Chapter 4 and they said, "Here, rabbi, here's some food. Eat. I mean, that's the whole point why we stopped in this place." You know what Jesus' response was? "I have food to eat that you know nothing about."

I don't know what your relationship with food is. I have a really good relationship with food. I love it. I love it. I just don't eat it to sustain my life. I just... I love it. I mean, I could eat right now. I mean, I'm not only empowered and interested in food, it's just a great experience. Talk about joy, food better be a part of it. Right? It's just a good thing. I love food. All of us do. Right?



Jesus said, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." What's the point? The analogy is, "I'm sharing the gospel. I don't need your falafel, your sandwich, whatever you brought. I am sharing the gospel." That is a big deal. And now I'm going to ask you, as you see the people coming across the valley, you can picture their white turbans on their heads and their robes, their light color robes, he said, "The fields are white for harvest." That's where that phrase comes from.

"Lift up your eyes. You say, 'There are yet four months and then comes to harvest,'" his little parable about when the harvest comes. "Look, I'm telling you, right now there's a harvest," put your sandwich down. And as they come, you start talking. And I love the way he puts this in the passage. He says, "Already one is reaping and receiving wages." Just like when you eat a good sandwich. It's like "ahh..." He says, I'm already receiving that. "And gathering fruit for eternal life." Nothing's bigger than that, it's connecting people with God. And he said, I want you to engage in this "so that the sower and the reaper," here's the good word, "may rejoice together." I think you could put aside your sandwich to find the ultimate delight, the ultimate satisfaction in being the means by which people have convicted hearts, converted minds and connected lives to the redeemed people of God.

Some of you've seen these passages in Acts Chapter 1 and Act Chapter 2 as harsh sermons. Not harsh in the sense that I'm wagging my finger at you, but harsh in the sense that you feel the pressure. "Oh, he wants us to share the gospel and I'm feeling the pressure." I can't apologize for that. I certainly shouldn't apologize as an evangelical pastor, in an evangelical church talking about evangelism. That's the whole point. But I can say this: if you've seen it more as duty and an assignment I need you to try and shift your heart to get more in line with Christ, who sees this as a great, satisfactory, joyful, meaningful, significant, pleasurable experience.

I want to be the means by which people's hearts are convicted, their minds are converted, their lives are connected. I want to be that. I want to find joy in it. Find this as not "I have to share the gospel." Let's get around to "I get to share the gospel." Let's stop saying I got to speak up with Christ, even if it's embarrassing, even if it's a struggle, even if you struggle with that sense of what will they think of me? Just get past the "duty part" to the "delight part," get past the "have to" to the "get to."

I heard a lot about the Grand Prix, went there, heard it, smelled it, saw it. Powerful machines. It was great. It came around once a year. But there was something akin to that I never went to but I heard about every Sunday afternoon when I was a kid. That was these boat races they did at a place called Marine Stadium. I don't know if any of you remember that, you Long Beach people. They used to do drag boat races there. And I'll tell you what, it was one thing to see those Formula One cars, but these were like giant engines on like a canoe. You know, they were just... it was all engine.

And as the crowd flies, I lived about two miles from Marine Stadium and I guess the way the engines were, you know, pointed toward our house, this was the loudest thing. Sunday afternoons after church, sometimes it is just chill time at our house and, you know, mom would make us take a nap or whatever. I remember the window open through the screen I would hear it on Sunday afternoons and it was so loud. Talk about power. There's one thing to hear that



throaty roar of a Formula One car, but to hear these jets, you know, like huge engines, which, by the way, I'm not talking about going 40, 50, 60 miles an hour. The record back in the 70s was 203 miles per hour these boats would race. Amazing. It was not unusual to have 150 miles, 170 miles, 190 miles, 200 miles an hour. And they just flew with a giant engine. It was just... talk about power. I knew nothing louder. I mean, I've been to Lions Drag Strip as a kid. I've been to the Grand Prix. But those boats, I mean, that was just the ultimate.

Proverbs, and we often quote this when we talk about the destructive power of your words. I'd like to flip it around on you this morning. When it says "life and death are in the power of the tongue." We talk about the destructive nature of the tongue. James certainly warns us. Right? You have a tongue, a capacity to speak words that can just destroy like a forest fire. I mean, many a forest has been set ablaze by just a small little word.

I want you to flip that around, though. It's not just that death is in the power of the tongue. Life is in the power of the tongue. Matter of fact, the preceding verse there in Proverbs 18 is the harvest. I mean, it's a great verse. Let me read it to you. It says this. It says, "The fruit of a man's mouth, by his stomach is satisfied. He is satisfied by the yield of his lips. Yet, death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits."

I want you to think of that in the positive sense. If you love to share the words of life, then you are going to eat the fruit of that. You're going to be like Christ saying, there's nothing better than for me to look at a gal who's got a messed up life and to say I was messed up too, in our case, and you can have forgiveness. You got to admit the problem. You got to let God convert your mind. You got to connect yourself to the people of God. This is good news. It's life-changing news.

Some people think it's too hard. I'm sure the Romans thought that when Paul penned these words in Romans Chapter 10. Some people think the words that we need, you've got to go up to heaven to get them. Well, they've already been dispensed. He says the word is not far. Someone doesn't have to go to heaven to get this message to change life. He says it's already there. "It's in your mouth and it's in your heart." And then he goes on to say this: "Anyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." The point is this: it's the whole passage about "who's going to ever believe in Christ if they don't first hear it? Someone's got to give it to them. How beautiful are the feet of those who share that good news?"

I'm telling you what, you have power. You can talk about the Super Bowl. You can talk about the World Series. You can talk about politics. There are a lot of things you can chat about with the people of this world this week. I'm just saying, can you turn the attention to Christ? Can you bring back the diagnosis of Scripture to the conversation that all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God? Can you let them know that we're all living on the downslope of Mount St. Helens and unless we get in the Ark, the flood is going to come and take us away? You can make fun of me in terms of a turn-or-burn message if you want. You can try to dismiss me as a caricature, trying to scare people into heaven with threats of hell. But the bottom line is we need the grace and forgiveness of the cross.



And you have that message in your mouth. How important are you to those lost people in your life? The power doesn't belong to you. I get it. But the power is in the Word and that word is in your mouth. We've just got to open up our lips and let that out. Encourage you this week to be vocal for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let's pray. Would you stand with me before we dismiss here? Let me pray with you before we leave. God, just before we leave, we want to first of all look at this, I suppose, from the point of view that many of us here are recipients of that work of the gospel. We've had that convicted heart. We've had our minds transformed. We've been connected to the church and enjoying the blessings and benefits of being part of the body of Christ.

But, God, there's another perspective here in this passage. We need to be the agents of getting that done in other people's lives. Help us not to downplay our importance or to think of ourselves as nothing. While you could use a donkey, I suppose, like you did with Balaam to speak truth, you've chosen to use us. So let us be willing instruments in your hands to see hearts convicted, minds transformed, and lives connected to your people.

In Jesus name. Amen.